

Special Town Meeting Town of Washington, CT  
Bryan Memorial Town Hall  
June 2, 2011 at 7:30 p.m.

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Moderator: Hank Martin  
Clerk: Sheila Silvernail

First Selectman, Mark Lyon, addressed the meeting requesting nominations for Moderator. Nick Solley nominated Hank Martin with Kathy Gollow seconding. With no other nominations, Hank Martin was chosen Moderator by acclamation.

Moderator: Thank you Mark. I declare this special town meeting to be open. Sheila, would you read the warning please?

Clerk: Warning: Town of Washington  
Special Town Meeting, June 2, 2011 7:30 p.m.

The voters and electors of the Town of Washington are hereby warned that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Thursday, June 2, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. at Bryan Memorial Town hall, Washington Depot, Connecticut to consider and act upon the following:

1. To approve an expenditure of a \$150,000 STEAP Grant awarded to the Town of Washington for construction of a pedestrian crossing for individuals using Bee Brook Road (Route 47) and the Hidden Valley Preserve.

Dated at Washington, Connecticut this 26<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2011

Mark E. Lyon, James L. Brinton, Nicholas N. Solley  
Board of Selectmen

Moderator: Thank you. The good news is there's only one item so we'll have a motion, a formal resolution for this item. Hopefully it will be seconded and then we'll open it up to discussion. And, after we have discussed it as much as we want to, we'll have a vote on it and then we're done. Could I have the motion please Mark?

Mark Lyon: **Resolved: The First Selectman be authorized to execute any and all documents necessary or desirable in order to obtain the Small Town Economic Assistance Program Grant of \$150,000 awarded to the Town of Washington for offsite fabrication and transportation of footbridge structural components to be used by Steep Rock Association, Inc. in construction and erection of a pedestrian crossing in Hidden Valley Preserve in proximity of the Route 47 Department of**

**Transportation Bridge No. 01007, and to disburse all grant funds received for that purpose.**

Moderator: **Could I have a second for that please?**

Wm. Smith: **Second.**

Moderator: Mary Anne or Willy. Ok, as we open it up to discussion what I'd like to do is to have the people that are involved with advocating or presenting the major option at hand have a chance to explain what they want to do. Would anybody from Steep Rock or the architectural designer want to make any introductory comments before we open it up to questions and comments and observations?

Mark Lyon: Just as a point of clarification this is to expend a STEAP grant that was received by the Town of Washington specifically for this purpose. It would be, if we don't use it for this purpose, it would be returned to the state because it is very specific about what it was given for. And, by approving this and having Steep Rock Association construct their pedestrian crossing we would in turn initiate the process to have the DOT put in a change order to delete the pedestrian bridge that they have proposed to be erected immediately adjacent to the highway bridge as it was depicted in the back. I want everybody to understand that the approval of this STEAP grant and the approval of spending it by, to help Steep Rock with their bridge, we will in turn delete the DOT bridge.

Ed White: My name is Ed White. I'm the president of Steep Rock. We looked at this as, and I know some of you were here for the other meeting, but just to kind of bring you up to speed. When the state bridge was proposed, Mark with a little prodding from Steep Rock as well, went forward to the, you know, the state and said, "Was there a possibility as they designed their bridge," and their bridge is as depicted back there with four feet more on each side of the travel zone so larger than what we have now. There was a discussion that could we have the possibility of a pedestrian bridge in addition to that highway bridge. So that was considered and the state said sure. Once all of us saw the plans coming in there was a concern that the plans indicated, as only the state will do, it was going to be built very securely with high fences, with side chain link fences to direct people away from the water. Also that there were other aspects that we hadn't thought about that we might be able to change in that area. So at the same time we were approached as Steep Rock by the Gould Foundation with an idea of would you entertain potentially doing an alternate bridge as opposed to the state highway bridge. So we started a study. We looked at it. We brought in Alan Organschi and his team in conjunction with the Gould Foundation who assured us that the initial cost all the way up until the point where we would bring it forward to the town to consider would

be covered. Then once we all know what the feelings were of the town, they were going to fund this because Steep Rock frankly doesn't have the funds to build a complicated bridge. So we took this as an opportunity to look at the whole area which we did. We looked at the flow of people, the flow of parking lots, the safety and what we jointly came up with after three or four different renditions, people going looking at the flow of the river, the flow of people. We came up with our final design which at that point we thought, ok, let's add all this up. What are all the positives? Were they enough to bring it forward to our partner which we've been partners with the Town of Washington. Frankly we're part of the Town of Washington. All of us are on boards. We all have been, two-thirds of us if not ninety-nine percent of us live here all full time. So we're part of the town. It was very important to our board to put it together, go through the list. Was this a strong enough proposal to be brought forward to the town to consider? We had a vote. We said yes. There were enough things there between flow of people; safety on the road because it would get people off Route 47; handicap accessibility over the bridge to the northern part of Steep Rock which is not available now; and a different entrance overall, a safe entrance, especially with the south parking lot, the site lines are much better than backing out into 50 mph traffic on the north side of the bridge.

So all that said we brought it forward to the last discussion and as I said last time, we jointly are at a crossroads. We've got two bridges, two gifts in a way. One the state is giving the town because we asked for it. It may not be the most functionally or great or attractive bridge, but it's Option A. It's not costing the town anything. It's not costing Steep Rock anything. The maintenance of that bridge would be born by the town. B, the alternate bridge which we've worked through and thought there was enough merit to bring it forward, and that's why we're sitting here, would be funded by the Gould Foundation, no cost to the town, no cost to Steep Rock. The cost of maintenance would fall with Steep Rock. So that's kind of the frame of it. The next process will, we can describe. I don't know if, Alan, you've got any. At this point there's I guess we could, questions? That's the flow of this.

Moderator:

I think. I think one thing I wanted to clarify was when Ed said that the alternative bridge – Can we just call it the Steep Rock Bridge for the sake of understanding tonight? We'll call it the Steep Rock Bridge. – Steep Rock is going to bear all future responsibility for maintenance of that bridge. If we have the DOT build it's bridge, the Town of Washington will bear the responsibility for maintenance of the bridge in the future. So that is another difference between the two options. The other thing I wanted to say before I opened it up is that if this body tonight votes in favor of the Steep Rock Bridge by voting in favor of using the \$150,000 STEAP grant, then I guess the next step for you [directed to Ed White] as the applicant will be to develop an application and run it through the Inlands/Wetlands

Commission because obviously it's a bridge over a river. Construction is taking place within one-hundred feet of the river. So they have jurisdiction over that and they will do their thing. And that would be the next step in this process having submission to Inlands/Wetlands.

Ok, time to open it up so I'm looking for hands. Anybody who wants to speak for the application or against it, please raise your hands and we'll get to you. In the back, would you please identify yourself and your street address for the purposes of our minutes. Hold on. We're going to get a microphone to you or you can come up to this one. We have a surplus of microphones since we have this great new sound system here. Hold on, it was for her in the back first if you don't mind and then we'll get it to you. I apologize.

Irene Allen: Actually, my name is Irene Allen and I have a question. Do you foresee anything that might happen in the Inlands/Wetlands process that could derail this bridge concept? And, should that happen, can we go back to the state for the DOT bridge?

Moderator: As a former Commissioner of the Zoning Commission, I would want to say that we would never want to prejudge what any of the land use commissions would do when they take a look at an application. They're going to look at it. They're going to evaluate it fairly and I guess there's sort of three things that they could do. They could accept it, approve it rather. They could reject it or they could approve it with conditions. And it's, I don't think it would be appropriate to guess what they might do. It's their jurisdiction and it's their process so we just don't know at this point. The second part of your question in say it gets rejected let's say, what happens? Mark do you want to answer that one?

Mark Lyon: I, I can't say that I have a concrete answer, but one of the reasons we're here now prior to having Steep Rock taking this through our local approval process is there's a deadline that the contractor has imposed so far as ordering the components of the DOT pedestrian bridge. And, to get it deleted prior to the expenditure of those funds, we have to decide prior to his last date that he gave us was June 16<sup>th</sup>. I have made inquiries of the DOT as to whether it could be, if we could go back to it say in September, and I have ... other than the local people saying no because that's going to be too late for the contractor to complete his work on schedule which in turn is going to impose penalties on him. There may be opportunities further up in DOT that I haven't, that I don't get to talk to, that could change that, but currently I would – the indications I get from the local DOT people I'm able to talk to is that, no, the opportunity to bring the DOT bridge back later in the process doesn't exist at this time.

Ed White: As Hank said, he was the head of Zoning. I was the head of ZBA for a while so I wouldn't want to prejudice anything either. All I can say is what we've done on a preliminary basis that would set us up to give us the appropriate information for Wetlands is that it's been run twice on a preliminary basis through the DEP. Also, the design if you look at it is outside of the 100-year floodplain. Help me Alan. What other, what else am I missing? There are different components just in the design itself that brings it into an area where it should be. We have everything put together for Wetlands to look at.

Alan Organschi: I, that's accurate. I mean there are two bodies. The bridge was designed.

Moderator: Could you introduce yourself?

Alan Organschi: Oh yeah, my name is Alan Organschi and I live at 155 West Morris Road in Washington and also I'm one of the principals. I'm a member of the design team at Gray Organschi Architecture. We're the team that worked with Steep Rock and First Selectman Lyon to explore the bridge feasibility.

The bridge is. We have a lot of experience with Inland/Wetland concerns and ecological design and construction in our firm and have built several bridges and are very familiar with the requirements. So all that we can do professionally is try to achieve the very best use of the site with the lowest construction impacts. And, that's been the primary criterion for design of bridge as required by Steep Rock and the town. That doesn't of course, there's no guarantee that there might be some objections so that's part of the process that we would go through, but the bridge, all the bridge components are outside of wetland proper. They do not land in the wetland. They are above the 100-year floodplain which is not a, which is Department of Environmental Protection concern. We've met with them twice. Hydrologically the bridge meets their requirements for clearances in flood stage. The bridge is actually higher than the DOT bridge in elevation so prevents less of a hindrance or obstruction. And, all of the construction work is done outside of the, outside of the wetland. So it's staged from outside the wetland and from higher ground. So that's part of the concern obviously. Construction traffic has been reduced. And, also because the bridge is largely prefabricated offsite components, there's a lot less time spent on the site. So the construction schedule actually onsite is quite short, five weeks rather than a protracted extended period which obviously has wetland impacts. So having said that, those, those were the, those were the goals of the design, but of course it needs to be reviewed as part of the process as we're having this review today with the town. We also have to go through the proper steps and I think Steep Rock felt it would be presumptuous to go to a commission and demand their time without having first gotten the approval of the town.

Moderator: Thank you, ok the gentleman in the brown jacket there. Thank you.

Larry O'Toole: Yeah, my name is Larry O'Toole. I'm up on Kielwasser Road. I had two questions. The first one, just a clarification with this grant. You don't need grant for state bridge? The state bridge doesn't require?

Moderator: No, they would just build it.

Larry O'Toole: So we pursued this grant? The town pursued the grant for the bridge? Who initiated to get the grant? The town?

Moderator: Ok, do you want to get that one answered before you ask your second one?

Larry O'Toole: And the second one is this. I mean, I think the Selectmen felt it was, I think, a smart move and they saw a new bridge going in, let's get a pedestrian bridge, but what was your reason? Wasn't it to connect the parking lots? Wasn't that the prime reason to connect the parking lots so people don't have to transverse the roadway if they, if their friends are on one side and they're on the other, or they're making a loop and coming around? I'm not. Maybe someone could elaborate on this new bridge would substitute for that because I don't, you know, I've walked along the river and when you're on the north side, you know, there's a rather steep hill to climb before you get on the, you know, the trail that goes down, up the river I guess. And, I could just see myself, the shortest way between two points if I wanted to come back to my car on the north side, would be not, would be, you know, to come across the roadway. So that would kind of defeat the purpose of, of the bridge. On the other hand, this bridge is very attractive and it has a lot of other benefits, but maybe someone could address the fact you said that during the discussion a lot of things were talked about, well, communication between the parking lots. I would think that's one of the prime issues. Those are my ...

Moderator: Mark, how did we get the STEAP grant and would you talk about some of the comparative pros and cons between the two bridges.

Mark Lyon: The comparative pros and cons is ... editorializing. The STEAP grant was obtained. We going back probably a little over a year now when Steep Rock first approached me to see if there's an opportunity to, for an alternative to the DOT proposal. We went and through ... set up the meeting between us and some of the higher ups in DOT to see if their budget for their proposal for a pedestrian crossing could be allocated to an alternate. For a number of reasons, regulatory reasons, and so on and so forth that wasn't possible, but through some work from some Washington

citizens and their connections with Jodi Rell, we were, a STEAP grant was made available. At which point they said this is available if you would like to use it. That's where we're at here. That's how we ended up with the STEAP grant. We, so I guess, in turn, in and indirect fashion we initiated it because we were looking to use the DOT sidewalk budget for an alternate if possible. That wasn't possible yet the STEAP grant was made available to us as a same type of opportunity. Initially we're probably going back two or three years when DOT first proposed the reconstruction of the 47 bridge. There was no sidewalk. It was just purely a traffic bridge as it's depicted there. And it was myself and maybe two or three other people at their public review hearing here in this town hall and I said it would be a good idea to get the pedestrians off the highway. And that's. There were several different design phases from the DOT as to their til when they ended up with this. And, I mean, personally, I thought, you know, how hard can it be to cantilever a three-foot sidewalk off the side of a concrete bridge. That isn't what they came back with. What they came back with and one of the issues there just as it. Their regulations won't allow to have an undivided. There would have to be a guardrail between the sidewalk and the traffic. That's their rules. And, like I said, their final design came back with a separate ... structure immediately adjacent to, but the next step was, you know, Steep Rock said well, you know, we think we can improve this, provide a more aesthetically pleasing bridge and that's the proposal that they came back with. And, Ed, I don't if you want to. Like I said, my initial motivation was that people using the area, walking in the area, wouldn't have to walk on the shoulder of the road.

Ed White:

And that's how it, that's how it progressed in the beginning. the initial discussion was, "Ok, does it make sense to have instead of just the new highway bridge, to have a pedestrian bridge." The initial discussion was about the two different, you know, parking areas until once we got the opportunity to look at it when the Gould Foundation came forward and said they would fund it, fund another alternative, the Steep Rock Bridge, now we're calling it the Steep Rock Bridge. Then we started looking at, ok, we have this alternative, how could we use this best? How could we make this work best? And so we've just started because we're at the point if this gets approved or doesn't get approved, we have to deal with whatever is going to be dealt us. At this point we've been talking about in general that the, exactly what you described, is that when people park in the north lot, first they're all on state land. That isn't Steep Rock. It's all state land. That's going to be closed for the good, you know, good part of the year plus while this construction is going on because the temporary bridge, the roadway is going right through that parking lot. we've looked at the bridge that's there that is our bridge which the landings are on our land, but still in the right-of-way, state right-of-way. So we've looked at that and we've looked at the hillside that you just described. So all those things together including the sight lines of people pulling in and out of that

parking lot and the thought that cars do go by there pretty quickly, that discussion has been started. So, sure, if the alternate Steep Rock Bridge was approved, the same place that you want to get to would. You'd be able to park in the main lot, walk directly over the bridge and be at the same point without the hillside going up and down which is an ongoing maintenance problem for us. So those are just the, as I said, those are the factors we've looked at as we have weighed what could happen with that area.

Moderator: Ok, I'm looking for more hands, questions, comments, observations, pro, con? Yes?

Pat Sears: I'm Pat Sears, Pat Sears

Nick Solley: ... hold the mic

Pat Sears: Oh, thank you, so just to clarify what was just said. This Steep Rock Bridge isn't really that far from the road then, is it? How, how many feet in from the road is it?

Mark Lyon: It's about 400. It's about 400-feet in from the highway, but it's probably, what is it 100, 100, maybe 125-feet from the end of that north parking lot? Or south parking lot right? Yeah.

Ed White: So people would drive into the south parking lot, go to the head of that, go to the head of that parking lot and basically the bridge would be right there. So it would get everybody off 47 and also offer for the first time, you know, a way to get over handicap accessible, something that we can't offer with that little bridge up above from the north parking lot now. So, is that driving this? No, but is it another one of those factors that we lined up and said, "Ok this makes this enough to bring it forward to you."

Moderator: John?

John Millington: John Millington. I have two loves plus my wife, definitely my wife, is she here in the room? Yes. I love Steep Rock. I've been involved with that for many years. I was a president ... and I love this town. If you don't believe it, come by and any sunny afternoon and you'll see me sitting on the bench observing what goes on in the town. It's a lovely spot. Without getting dramatic about it, I will say it seems that this is a win-win situation. This is a gift both to the town and to Steep Rock in that order. And, it's not costing us anything and I might add that Governor Rell is looking with favor on this when she discussed it. so I would only say one other thing and he asked me not to mention him, but I will and that's Edwin Mathews. And I'll mention because he probably has spent more hours defending the river, making sure we have the right flow which we

didn't have for years and years and he did this all pro bono. He works for a major NY law firm and the advocate from the Gould Foundation who presented this was Edwin Mathews. So I can't conclude this without reminding all of us that there's a third love here and it's Edwin and the river. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Are we ready to vote? Carlos? Hold on for a minute. The mic's coming to you.

Carlos Canal: Carlos Canal, Sabbaday Lane. Will the parking facilities be expanded, improved in any way on the south side and what eventually happens to the north side parking facility? Will that continue to be as it is or will it be expanded in any way?

Ed White: The south parking lot as part of this overall project, we're getting some plans done and that's going to be totally redone. And, especially if it ever became the only parking lot. We've already when we talked about it the other day in preparation of the year-long closing of the north. We're already going to do some maintenance there and you know, mow more of that area and delineate parking a little bit easier because right now it's still set up the way it's been set up for the last I don't know how many years. And, everybody just pulls in one line and then figures there's no more parking there. So we are going to renovate that parking lot and if the Steep Rock Bridge was approved we would have it terraced all the way up to the bridge entrance. The north parking lot is something that's under discussion. It's, just because of the site lines, because we don't own it, we're not really sure what the state's going to do when. For all we know, you know, I don't know. They may leave it the same. They're going to be paving over it. We have no indication what they're going to do. So that's something we're just going to have to deal with. My "drothers" that the, with the worry that I have is the speed of the cars down, you know, the highway there and you watch people backing out into traffic. And so, it's not the best. It's never been the best parking lot. It's not the best entrance into Hidden Valley, but we're just going to have to deal with it, whatever comes forward. The key point is that we don't own it.

Moderator: Looking for more hands. Two in the back. Let's go with, yes, yes. Oh you were, you were trying to help Andy. Ok.

Andy Shappiro: We've all heard the expression, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." I fear that if the DOT pedestrian bridge is built very few if any people will cross it when they come to it. I think it's pretty clear that joggers and bike riders, for example, are not going to when they approach the bridge at least from the south side are not going to get off of their path and either go down around the guardrail or vault over the guardrail in order to get onto the pedestrian bridge and cross it. So they won't be using it. I listened to

Larry's question and I don't know what all this traffic is that's going to, foot traffic that's going to be going back and forth between the north parking lot and the south parking lot unless it's people who parked in one place, but then they want to walk back to check and see whether it would be it would be better to park in the other place. I mean what are they doing going back and forth? So that leaves to my way of looking at it the only possible group which I think could make use of the DOT pedestrian bridge and that would be pedestrians and they may well the DOT bridge simply because if they only use the four-foot shoulder on the highway bridge, they've got two obstructions to look through. And if they use the pedestrian bridge, they only have one obstruction to look through to try and get a glimpse of the river through the bars that are up there. So it seems to me that there's very little utility to be gotten by the town from the construction of the DOT pedestrian bridge, but on the other hand there's a good deal of utility to be gotten by the town from the construction of the Steep Rock Bridge which after all improves and will enhance the use of Steep Rock which is our park. Everyone who lives in the town. So better we should get the bridge that's going to enhance Hidden Valley and the use of Hidden Valley than a bridge that as far as I can tell very few people are going to cross when they come to it.

Moderator: Thank you. I'm scanning left and right. I don't see any hands. Oh, yes! You're asking a question for yourself now?

Carolyn Setlow: Thank you, yes. No, I just had a footnote to what ... Andy said. I'm ... Carolyn Setlow, Lower Churchill Road. I was here was it just last week when we had the town meeting and saw the pictures of what the DOT footbridge was going to look like and I haven't heard it stressed this evening, but it was in my way of thinking an absolute eyesore. Andy described it as only one wall of fencing. That was a very heavy wall of fencing that frankly I think would nearly block the view of the river, one of the great assets of this town. I just wanted to be sure that that was repeated again this week. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Do we have any pictures of that here tonight?

Mark Lyon: In back there's several.

Moderator: Of the DOT?

Mark Lyon: Yes.

Moderator: View blocking? Ok, if anybody would like to go up and take a look, I'm told that there are pictures in the back of the room. Any other questions? Carlos? Hold on.

Carlos Canal: I think that many of you know that I've been involved with environmental issues in town for quite a long time with different organizations. And, while I'm speaking for myself this evening, we're all indeed very, very fortunate to live in Washington with all of the great natural resources we have at our disposal. I've always viewed it as being a very select spot in that there are three essential natural resources which I refer to as the three environmental crown jewels of Washington. And not in order of importance there of course is Steep Rock, Lake Waramaug, and the Shepaug River. There are very, very few communities where you can find this confluence of beauty coming together. And, obviously it being a beautiful, natural resource we want to put up the bridge that is right for it and there's no doubt as you look at the two structures that the only bridge that really would qualify so that Steep Rock could be maintained as one of those great natural resources and if we get greater use out of it, would be the proposed Steep Rock Bridge. So I encourage one in all to be in favor that alternative rather than the other. And lastly, it is not costing the town anything. It doesn't cost anyone a cent to go in and enjoy Steep Rock. I know that many, many people in town do use it. Many, many out-of-towners also use it in that it's so attractive so I think we all have a responsibility to make certain that it is maintained at the level of beauty and usefulness that we've become accustomed to. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. I see no more hands so I'm going to declare that the period of discussion is over and we're ready to vote. I'm going to read the motion one more time and then ask for a show of hands. Let me say before I read the motion that this is a motion supporting the use of \$150,000 STEAP grant. It is in effect an endorsement or a show by this body in favor of the Steep Rock Bridge if there's any questions about that. Ok, I'll read it.

**Resolved: The First Selectman be authorized to execute any and all documents necessary or desirable in order to obtain the Small Town Economic Assistance Program Grant of \$150,000 awarded to the Town of Washington for offsite fabrication and transportation of footbridge structural components to be used by Steep Rock Association, Inc. in construction and erection of a pedestrian crossing in Hidden Valley Preserve in proximity of the Route 47 Department of Transportation Bridge No. 01007, and to disburse all grant funds received for that purpose.**

Moderator: **So we have the motion. It's been seconded. All in favor of this motion please say aye.**

Audience: **Aye. Aye. [Overwhelming assent.]**

Moderator: **Any opposed?**

Audience: **No. No. [Scattered dissent.]**

Moderator: **A handful. Any abstains? Ok, I declare that the motion has passed. And, since this is the only item on the agenda I also declare that we are adjourned. Thank you very much.**

Adjourned 8:15 p.m.

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I, Sheila R. Silvernail, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages are true and accurate to the best of my ability of the Special Town Meeting of the Town of Washington held on June 2, 2011.

 Dated at Washington, CT this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of June 2011